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THE MESSAGE
OF
SRI AUROBINDO
AND
THE ASHRAM

9/92

THE MESSAGE
OF
SRI AUROBINDO
AND
THE ASHRAM

SRI AUROBINDO NIKETAN
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This brochure is issued in response to the growing demand from the public for information about the Ashram and Teachings of Sri Aurobindo, and the Sri Aurobindo University Centre. We are thankful to the Ashram authorities for making available, for the purpose, Sri Nolini Kanta Gupta's article on The Message of Sri Aurobindo and the succeeding two by Sri M. P. Pandit, of which the latter was issued to the Press sometime ago and the former specially written at our request.

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THE MESSAGE OF SRI AUROBINDO

FROM a certain standpoint Sri Aurobindo's message is very simple, almost self-evident. The sum and substance of all he says is that man is growing and has to grow in consciousness till he reaches the complete and perfect consciousness, not only in his individual but in his collective, that is to say, social life. In fact, the growth of consciousness is the supreme secret of life, the master key to earthly evolution.

Sri Aurobindo believes in evolution. Creation, according to him, has a purpose and man moves to a goal. That is nothing else than the unfolding of consciousness. Originally all was Matter, only dead Matter. At a certain stage out of Matter came Life: what was or appeared to be dead became alive. Thus the plant world was born—the first primeval stirring of consciousness, a consciousness vague, blind, practically unconscious, yet moved by a newly acquired or awakened pulsation. There was again a period of gestation and incubation bringing out at the end a rudimentary Mind, a first conscious consciousness: so the animal was born. Consciousness is clearer and freer here, emerging into formulation: it is now instinct or sensibility and in its higher grades infused with a streak of spontaneous thinking. Sensuous mentality gave birth to Mind proper, that is thought, reflection and Man appeared. A fully awakened consciousness, consciousness that can turn round upon itself is the characteristic marking out human consciousness.

Such then are the stages in the progression of conscious-

ness; they are clearly observable and admitted practically on all hands. Only Sri Aurobindo points out two crucial characters of this movement. First: Matter, Life, Mind-Intelligence—these are not distinct or separate entities, one coming after another, the succeeding one simply adding itself to the preceding, coming we do not know from where. Not so, for something cannot come out of nothing. If life came out of Matter, it is because life was there hidden in Matter, Matter was secretly housing, was instinct with life. That only can evolve which was involved. So, again, if Mind came out of life, it is because Mind was involved in life and therefore also in Matter although at a farther remove. Yet again, vital mind developed into Intelligence and consciousness proper, and it could be only because that too was its secret nature and hence the secret nature of Life and even brute Matter. Thus the whole chain of gradation is linked together indissolubly and the binding reality that runs through all is consciousness, overt or covert. It is indeed consciousness that lies at the root of existence—the basic substance, Matter is nothing but consciousness become unconscious; and the whole scheme or processus of the cosmos is the increasing manifestation and expression of that consciousness. Secondly, the other character is that at each cross-over, there is not only a rise in consciousness but also a reversal of consciousness, that is to say, the level attained turns back upon the preceding levels, influencing and moulding them as far as possible in its own mode and law of existence. When life appeared in Matter, wherever there was material life, the matter thus taken up by life behaved differently from dead matter: an organic body does not follow the strict mechanical laws of inanimate bodies. Likewise a life endowed with

mind has a different functioning than mere life. And a body which houses a life and mind, which has, as it were, flowered into life and mind moves and acts in another way than an inert body or even a vitalised body. Man's intelligence and reason have reoriented or tend to reorient his vital instincts and reactions, even his bodily functions and forms. A conscious regulation, even refashioning of his life and body is the very essence of human consciousness, the urge of his nature, instead of a spontaneous *laissez-faire* movement of pure vitality or the mechanical go-round of the material base. These three major provinces or layers of consciousness—Matter, Life and Mind—man has taken up into himself and in the light of his consciousness—his Intelligence—has studied and classified them arranging them serially as the well-known sciences of Physics, Biology and Psychology.

Now, Sri Aurobindo says, evolution marches onward and will rise beyond Mind to another status of consciousness which he calls Supermind. In the earthly scheme there will thus manifest a new type, a higher functioning of consciousness and a new race or species will appear on earth with this new consciousness as the ruling principle. Out of the rock and mineral came the plant, out of the plant the animal, out of the mere animal man has come and out of man the Superman will come inevitably.

Standing on the mental plane, immured within the dimensions of Reason and mental intelligence, it is not easy to contemplate the type of consciousness that will be; even as it was difficult for the ape to envisage the advent of his successor, man. But certain characteristic signs, rudimentary or fragmentary movements of the higher status are visible in the mental consciousness even as it is:

the ape likewise was not without a glimmer of Reason and logic, even the faculty of ratiocination that seems to be the exclusive property of man. There is, for example, a movement we call Intuition, so different from Reason to which even Scientists and Mathematicians acknowledge their debt of gratitude for so many of their discoveries and inventions. There is also the other analogous movement called Inspiration that rules the poet and the artist disclosing to them a world of beauty and reality that is not available to the normal human consciousness. Again, there is yet another group of human beings at the top of the ladder of evolution—mystics and sages—who *see* the truth, possess the truth direct through a luminous immediacy of perception, called Revelation. Now, all these functionings of consciousness that happen frequently enough within the domain of normal humanity are still expressions of a higher mode of consciousness: they are not the product or play of Reason or logical intelligence which marks the character, the differentia of human consciousness.

But, as at present, these are mere glimmers and glimpses from elsewhere and man has no command or control over them. They are beyond the habitual conscious will, they come and go as they like, happy visitations from another world, they do not abide our question and are not at our beck and call. The Supermind, on the contrary, is in full possession of that consciousness of which these are faint beginnings and distant echoes. The Superman will be born when man has risen above his mind and emerged into the supramental consciousness.

One thing needs to be pointed out here: it is that man is expected to consciously transcend himself and deliver this supermanhood, for it is to be a conscious process, a

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labour of the wakeful will. That is the great difference which the new transition has brought in. So long evolution was a spontaneous and apparently unconscious process, moving slowly and inadvertently as things in nature normally move. Man rose out of the animal: he simply found himself man one day, there was no conscious effort, no previous knowledge of the change on the part of the animal undergoing the change. Likewise the animal came out of its plant origin spontaneously and unwittingly: the plant too evolved out of the inert and inanimate matter through a natural process of slow mutation. But now at the stage of manhood consciousness has become fully conscious, self-conscious, and therefore its further ascension cannot but be conscious, ever more conscious, the result of deliberate energising. This is a process of self-transformation. It has a method, a technique, a whole system of its own. The growth of consciousness, its culture and transformation is the end and purpose of all true education: its highest consummation, its supreme perfection is what is intended by Yoga, the mystic's system of inner discipline.

We say, then, supramentalisation of consciousness is the goal Nature is aiming at and man striving for: it is the next step that earth and man are taking in their evolutionary urge. Man, however, represents a very crucial stage—he is the dividing line between two hemispheres—two modes of consciousness, two types of creation. As I have said, up to man it is a natural spontaneous unreflecting unconscious evolution: with man it is conscious, deliberate, wilful evolution. What was being done behind the veil in ignorance will now be done openly in full knowledge. The very first result will be the shortening of the time factor. The conscious process increases the tempo, telescopes into decades

or years a process or development that would take centuries or more otherwise: in man a growth is achieved in one life that would normally need several lives. The other characteristic result is that when the Supermind establishes itself, there is no more ignorance, it is all light and knowledge. Till the mental range, even at its highest heights, it is a mixture of light and darkness, of knowledge and ignorance: there is always an element of doubt, uncertainty or partial perception: there is a groping, a trial and one moves at best from greater darkness to lesser shade. With the Supermind all that changes: the Superman lives always in the full daylight, in the zenith consciousness, in the plenitude of knowledge. He moves from light to light, knowledge to knowledge, no longer bound to the division and duality inherent in the present human consciousness. It may be that man may not at a bound reach the peak of the Supermind: for there are lower ranges, voluntary limitations of the Light, less absolute formulations of the perfect being through which man will have to pass for a greater enrichment of his nature and for the establishment for other orders of luminous existence upon earth. Sri Aurobindo has, in this connection, spoken of the Overmind and the Mind of Light. But these too lie beyond the border of mental twilight and are domains of Light, own delegates of Supermind.

It may not be out of place here just to mention a few characters proper to this supramental over-border consciousness. First of all, it is the seat and organon of complete knowledge: knowledge here is not the result of the deductive and inductive process of reason, it does not balance pros and cons and out of uncertain possibilities strike out an average probability: it is direct, straight, immediate, certain and absolute. Knowledge here comes by

identity—the knower and the known are one and what is known is therefore self-knowledge. Secondly, the will too is not an effort or striving and struggling, but the spontaneous expression of the self-power of the consciousness: willing means achieving, one wills the inevitable truth, for knowledge and will too are one. Thirdly, it is status of perfect delight, for one has passed beyond the vale of tears and entered the peace that passeth understanding, one has found that Joy is the source of creation and the truth of existence is held in Ecstasy.

It is in other words at bottom the Vedantic status of Sat-chit-ananda (perfect being, consciousness-energy and Beatitude), but individualised serving as the basic reality of the world-life and existence: it is this that seeks to manifest and embody itself in its own dharma—supreme law—in and through the physical forms and modes of that life and existence. Beyond this it is not possible here to enter into the further mysteries of the Arcanum.

Lastly, another point and we have done. It is that all human efforts in the past in any realm or domain towards a higher life has been contributory to this supreme consummation that Sri Aurobindo envisages as coming or sure to come. It is very often asserted that human nature is irremediable and although we may try at a little amelioration of his instinctive life, especially as a social being, there can be no permanent or radical cure of the original sin of Ignorance and Inconscience with which his earthly nature is branded. Reformers, Idealists, even saints and sages have seen and sought to counter the evil—some tried to get rid of it, others round it: but it is still there, as rampant as ever, apparently with no effect upon it. For one thing, evil was sought to be cured by its opposite, the good, but

the good that belongs to the level of consciousness to which evil too belongs. In other words, we tried to deal with the world and treat it with the force of the Mind, even though in some cases, the mind was a high or even the highest spiritual mind. To touch the roots of the malady that extend into our deepest fibres, our most material being, dead inconscience, one must rise to the very source of consciousness, the creative truth-consciousness: the Supermind alone can transform the earth, transfigure the earthly life. In the second place, the past attempts did not all go in vain: they were preparations, the first ground-work, on various levels and in various domains of human life and consciousness where the light infiltrated, to whatever extent it may be, and things and forces were shaken and reshuffled to admit of other forces and inspirations; if nothing else, at least the possibility was created.

Sri Aurobindo's aim, we have said, is not an individual fulfilment, however glorious and successful it might be, and not merely the fulfilment of one limb only of the individual however deep and high. Sri Aurobindo embraced the whole man and the whole society. A fulfilled life in society upon earth—the highest and completest life possible, not only possible but inevitable to the human being—that is the work for which he laboured. Man's mind and intelligence, his life-energy, his body-form are all taken up, purified of the lower formulation, remoulded into the mode and pattern of the supramental truth-consciousness: he is a complete, integral, perfect being expressing and embodying in all his limbs and movements the supreme reality made of utter truth and knowledge and power and delight. This being his individual life, his collective or social life too would figure the same pattern. A new society in which men

have found their soul and soul function is a harmonious, a unitary body, composed of individuals who by living each one in his self live in all and living in all each one lives in his self. Likewise, an aggregate of such societies—a society of nations, as it is already called somewhat in a prophetic vein,—will also be an inherently harmonious and unified, even an unitary body too, since all these larger units will express through their corporate life each in its own special way the glory and greatness of the Divine Consciousness.

In this global reconstitution of the earth life, Sri Aurobindo gives India a great role—a mighty destiny and a heavy responsibility. For he considers India as the repository of the spiritual consciousness, the Guardian of Truth, as the Veda says, and in the new age of world unification her national being will act as the spearhead breaking into the old-world formations and signalling the shape of things to come.

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

Secretary,
Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM

This Ashram is not an organised institution. It is an organic growth, an organism. Neither planned nor built, it is a natural and living expression of the Personality of Sri Aurobindo.

When Sri Aurobindo came to Pondicherry, now more than four decades ago, he was joined by a few of his associates who chose to cast their lot with him. They lived with him as members of a household. As years passed by more joined. And after the Mother came in 1920, the number of persons began to increase until it was found necessary to set the arrangement on a larger basis to suit the needs of a collective life that had begun to take shape. More houses had to be hired and services arranged to ensure hygienic and ordered living. This may be said to be the beginnings of Sri Aurobindo Ashram—in 1926, the year when Sri Aurobindo went into complete retirement leaving charge of the establishment to the Mother.

A word in explanation of the term 'Ashram' is perhaps necessary in view of the connotation it has acquired by usage. An Ashram has come to mean something like a monastery, a Muth, a cloister of recluses where asceticism is the rule. But this is not what an Ashram meant in olden times, the ages of the Epics, the Upanishads or the Vedas. An Ashram was the house of a Master around whom

disciples, of both the sexes at times, gathered to acquire knowledge. They were of all ages and sought to gain diverse kinds of knowledge; he, the Guru, tended them like a father, equipped them with the best of himself and let them choose their own career when they had learnt what they had come for. There was no denial of any kind; the hermitages are recorded to have been bubbling with life and activity. It was a family household on a larger and nobler basis. And this is precisely the character of this Ashram; it was so when it had eight members and it is so today when there are eight hundred inmates. It is more like the hermitage of Vasishtha or Kanwa of ancient times, but suited to modern conditions, rather than an eclesiastical institution made familiar by the movements of organised religion like Christianity or Buddhism or even later day Hinduism.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother accepted and received as disciples some among their devotees, men and women, permitted them to stay with them and live the life of Sadhana under their direct guidance. These inmates have been lodged and looked after in residences arranged and maintained for them. Each one is in direct charge of the Guru without any institutional barriers in between.

Only those are accepted who have, in the judgment of the Mother, an inner call for this particular kind of spiritual life. All other considerations are secondary. It is expected of every one, who is thus permitted, that he (or she) offers his material possessions to her and she takes charge of him materially and spiritually. The Mother provides every one under her charge with all reasonable facilities for comfortable living. There are in the Ashram, always, a certain number of persons who are specially allowed to

participate in the Ashram-life though they are staying on a temporary basis; such visitors meet their own expenses. There are instances—and they have been by far the major number—of persons who have had nothing to offer, or those who had, but were not favourably circumstanced to meet this requirement; still they were and are being admitted into the Ashram if the Mother sees that they are meant for this life. The offerings thus made by devotees and disciples are all made personally to the Guru and there is no lien of any kind attached to them.

As the Ashram stands today, it has about seven hundred and fifty inmates—of varying ages, from tender to old age, —with about fifty temporary visitors. A considerable number of them have been lodged in houses owned by the Mother and the rest in hired houses. The houses are all spread over the environs of the main çentral building (9, Rue de la Marine) where Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have taken residence. Paid labour to the tune of over seven hundred workers is employed towards the maintenance of this colony. The expenses for running the Ashram average over a lakh of rupees per month and are largely met from offerings and contributions received from all over the world. These monetary contributions are entirely voluntary and unconditional and are accepted as such.

The residents of the Ashram have dedicated themselves to the Ideal of Sri Aurobindo. His teachings are their beacon light and the Mother their Pilot. That man can grow out of his present imperfections into a perfect individual, that the perfect man can become a nucleus and a Force for the evolution of a perfect society and that the true Unity of the Human Race can only outflower from a union on the soul level, is in substance the central part

of his teaching. The key to this change of man is essentially spiritual and it lies in the evocation and development of the latent faculties of his inner and innermost being. Man has to cease to live on the surface; he must learn to live from within outward—he must find his soul. All life in the Ashram centres round this Truth.

The basis of life here is wholly spiritual. An inner discipline is given, but it is on broad lines allowing each individual the necessary freedom for his nature and temperament to grow and change spontaneously. Broadly it consists of a progressive surrender of oneself—inward and based upon it the outward also—to the Guru, to the Divine; meditation, concentration, work, service—all these are means for a self-gathering in all one's movements with the sole aim of delivering oneself into the hands of a Higher Power for being worked on and led towards the Goal. The Mother guides, helps each according to his nature and need, and where necessary, herself intervenes with her Power enabling the Sadhak to withstand the rigours and demands of the Path. She has placed herself—with all the Love, Power, Knowledge and Consciousness that She is —at the disposal of every aspiring soul that looks to her for help.

In this Yoga, the gains of the spirit are not meant to be retained apart and aloof from the world. Freedom of the soul, yes, but freedom also for the rest of the being from bondage to ignorance, disease and darkness. The purity and height acquired by the consciousness, the will and the knowledge that grow in the mind, the emotions that surge uplifted and purified—all these are to be canalised into activity, expressed in life and made natural outflowings from the inmost self, the Divine within one's own self, for the

reclamation of the whole of the personality. All opportunity is given for this important part of Sadhana in the Ashram. In a community of such large numbers, there is a good deal of work to be done to keep life moving and that too on the lines and exacting standards laid down by the Mother. And the inmates voluntarily undertake to participate in carrying on the work. Work is welcomed: "To work for the Divine is to pray with the body" (*The Mother*). Each one takes up the part that is allotted to him, treats it as an opportunity to learn to do selfless service and makes of it a means for expression of his devotion to the Divine, utilises it as a fruitful field for a disciplined expression of his progressive realisation of the Ideal. No qualitative gradation, according to the common notions of higher and lower, is attached to any kind of work. A veteran industrialist, visiting the Ashram, on learning that an inmate who treated him to a 'learned discourse' had taken up hair-cutting as his part of the daily routine, exclaimed: 'Here is Communism in excelsis!' Indeed, it is, but in an exalted sense. Here in the Ashram, what is important is not what the work is, but how it is done. To the Mother it is not the capacity or efficiency of the individual that matters as much as the spirit in which he does the work. For ultimately it is the attitude of the being that really makes or mars the utility of work as part of Sadhana.

Man is essentially a mental being and any discipline that aims at his full-blown development has, of necessity, to take note of the need of training and processing the mind in order to make it function in its proper role of being at once the receiving medium and transmitting agent of higher knowledge. For that, the mind has to be developed to a degree of sufficient clarity and disentangled from the meshes

of life-desires and passions and sense impressions that normally hold it captive. A life of its own must be given to the mind. This need has met with a natural fulfilment through Sri Aurobindo whose writings and intellectual efflorescence have created a new age in the world of letters and opened fresh vistas on the cultural horizon. Under his inspiration and lead a growing number of writers, poets and artists have appeared—naturally with the distinctive outlook that characterises Sri Aurobindo's Ideal—and with the coming to age of the Ashram school, this part of the activity is getting a broader and deeper basis. The cosmopolitan composition of the Ashram has helped considerably in an effortless blossoming of a synthetic culture which holds in its womb the embryo of the world-culture of the morrow.

And then there is provision for the development and training of the physical body. For the body too has an important function in the integral perfection of man which is the aim of all endeavour here. Under the personal guidance and supervision of the Mother a Scheme of physical education is being worked out with minute care. The Scheme consisting of courses of physical culture, gymnastics, athletics, outdoor games, acquatics etc. aims at a detailed education of the human body, making of it a conscious entity with an individuality of its own, the concretised rhythm of the indwelling Spirit. The motive that actuates the whole discipline is spiritual—and each participant shares in the results to the extent he brings this motive to bear on his individual effort.

In all these spheres of Ashram life, there is perfect equality of opportunity for both the sexes. The usual distinction between man and woman, habits of life and thought based on the age-old relegation of woman as the weaker sex and

the legacy of sex-consciousness resulting from a virtual segregation of the opposite sexes, are sought to be obliterated in the pattern of life that is being evolved here.

II

If we allow a falsehood, however small, to express itself through our mouth or pen, how can we hope to become perfect messengers of Truth?

A perfect servant of Truth should abstain even from the slightest inexactitude, exaggeration or deformation.

THE MOTHER

Not to take care of material things which one uses is a sign of inconscience and ignorance.

You have no right to use any material object whatsoever if you do not take care of it.

You must take care of it not because you are attached to it, but because it manifests something of the Divine Consciousness.

THE MOTHER

Now that we have given a background which is necessary for an understanding of the life led in the Ashram, in a general way, we can proceed to give an outline of the external arrangements under which the day-to-day work is carried on. It must be noted, however, that here there is no hierarchy of officials and subordinates. Though the organisation is divided into a number of Services, each in charge of an inmate, every worker is directly responsible to the Mother, doing the part allotted to him by her.

Nobody works *under* anybody; all work in association, the one common aim being the best execution of task. The heads of the Services receive detailed instructions from the Mother as often as required. Right initiative is encouraged and freedom given to experiment and learn, within certain limits. Behind some possible appearances of lack of economy or want of streamlining at times, there lies an appreciation of the necessity of making the work more an occasion and a field for the play and growth of the developing personality of the individual than an end in itself.

To begin with, there are as many as a hundred and odd houses in which the inmates are lodged and these buildings need to be constantly attended to by way of repairs, constructions and the like. Fresh buildings are to be raised, to keep up with the increase in numbers of the inmates, and old ones renovated. This is done by the *Building Service* which has a labour corps of a hundred and fifty men with about twenty-five inmates working in various capacities. This service has its own Hollow Bricks and Concrete Blocks factories as also a Ceramics section.

There are other auxiliary Services necessary for the upkeep of the residences viz. *Sanitary Service*, *Water-Supply* and *Electric Services*. Many of the inmates do their own washing and cleaning; but there are a sufficiently large number who have their service attended to by the *Domestic Service*, during fixed hours of the day.

All living rooms are furnished with the minimum of a cot, a table, chair, cloth-stand and cup-board. Usually more items of furniture are to be found according to the need of the occupant. The *Furniture Service* which runs two carpentry workshops looks after the needs of the inmates and also the requirements of visitors.

The *Tailoring Sections* (for ladies and gents) attend to the supply of apparel and the *Blanchisserie* (Laundry) to the washing and ironing. Apart from the quota of washing-soaps given, each one is entitled to give five pieces every week for laundry wash. There is also a *Footwear Service* which supplies fresh sandals every year to the inmates and attends to mending and repairs.

There is a common kitchen and *Dining Room* where there are arrangements to attend to thousand people at a time. The food given is vegetarian; it is *sattwic* and is served with practically no spice. The normal fare consists of:

Breakfast:	1 cup of milk (with Cocoa if preferred) 1 Bun or three slices of brown (whole wheat) bread 1 plantain Sugar (quantity depending on current rations)
Lunch:	1 Bowl of rice 1 Bowl of vegetable 1 Cup of curds 2 plantains Lemon
Supper:	1 Cup of milk 4 Slices of bread 1 Bowl of vegetable.

It goes without saying adjustments in quantity are made to suit the requirements of individuals. Food is cooked and served by inmates. The majority of people take their food in the Dining Room; but there are a substantial number

to whom it is supplied in tiffin carriers by the *Cart Service*. The washing of dishes is done by the *Washing Section* (attached to the D. R.) also staffed by inmates. Each piece is treated to successive washings of medicated water.

There are arrangements to provide filtered water to the residents. Though reliance on the Yogic Force and on Nature is encouraged and even enjoined to keep the body free from illness, there is a *Dispensary* where allopathic and ayurvedic medicines are dispensed. In addition there are Homeopathic consultants. There is also a *Dentistry*. A *Massage Clinic* with electrical equipment has been recently started and also a *Clinical Laboratory*.

The Ashram has its own *Bakery* which supplies all the bread consumed. There is also a *Flour Mill* and an *Oil Mill* to meet the requirements of the kitchen and other needs. The *Fuel Service* supplies charcoal and wood to the kitchen and to such of the inmates as need fuel for their extra purposes.

The Ashram owns fields and coconut groves in addition to a number of *Gardens* which are serviced by a special corps. Though the yield of the paddy fields is not adequate to meet the Ashram needs, it is considerable and the harvesting is done by the inmates themselves. Fodder and sugar-cane are supplied from the fields. There is a *Dairy* where cows of special breed from upcountry have been maintained; a *Poultry* section is also working.

Part of the Ashram requirements in vegetables and fruits are met from the gardens. Flowers all over these gardens are plucked every morning and made available by the *Flower Service* to the Mother for distribution and to the inmates for offering. The vegetable kingdom has a consciousness of its own: and the Mother has interpreted the

true, inner and occult significance of each flower in terms of human language and enabled them to play their role in the collective life of the Ashram.

There are two *Workshops* where a number of inmates are learning and executing work of technical nature. Work of various kinds is undertaken: automobile and machinery repairs, sheet work, tinning, welding, stove and spray painting, are some of the items. There is a foundry, a smithy and a section of Fitters in this Service which has developed into a polytechnic, drawn upon on occasions by the local government and public.

The *Paper Service* utilises all waste paper and cloth rags for manufacturing varieties of thick paper and cardboards of varying thicknesses. Speaking of waste, we would add that nothing utilisable is allowed to be thrown away. Even used postal envelopes are collected for chit-pads, tea-leaves for horticulture purposes, cartons for handicrafts and other apparently waste-stuff for proper utility.

The *Weaving Service*, run by ladies with the help of paid labour, and the *Cottage Industries* turning out a variety of products from door-mats to tape-cots are the other useful additions.

Then there is the *Printing Press* equipped with two monotype machines, and machines for folding, cutting and stitching in the Bindery. Mostly it is being operated by the inmates. Though the Ashram printing work is heavy in itself, outside work is also undertaken. Printing is done in English, French, Hindi, Sanskrit, Marathi, Bengali, Gujerathi, Tamil, Telugu. Arrangements are being made to start a Chinese section. Flexo and block printing is also done.

The requirements of the Ashram are ordered for and secured by the *Purchasing Department*. Things are kept in

the Ashram Stores—the *Prosperity* as it is called. The inmates of the Ashram write on forms supplied to them previously stating their needs; and those items are given on the first of each month by the Mother at a special function when all go to receive her blessings.

The activities of the *School* are dealt with in a separate paper entitled "Sri Aurobindo University Centre: the Purpose". Suffice it to say here that the instruction imparted in the class room is supplemented by visual education in open air at the playground and by other activities of cultural value of which we shall give a brief account.

There is a growing *Library* where there are at present about 20,000 books in fifteen languages. The Library and the *Reading Room* attached to it where daily newspapers and periodicals are kept for general reading, are very popular resorts of the younger section of the inmates.

There are a number of amateur *Photographers* who have cultivated the art as a hobby and acquired a skill which has been singled out for eulogy in local Exhibitions. They turn out photographs of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Ashram scenes, portraits, general scenery etc. They have been permitted by the Mother to undertake Portrait and similar work for the visitors and the local gentry who frequently ask for their services.

There are also *Painters* who have struck out their own lines and some of their products, like the famous 'Hiranmaya Purusha', have come in for deep appreciation by Art Critics in India and abroad. There are plenty of young budding artists who receive training and help from the elders. *Music* —vocal and instrumental,—*Dance* and *Theatricals*—all these have their own exponents in the Ashram and those who desire to cultivate these arts are provided with facilities to

do so. The Ashram has its own *Band Orchestra* of about forty men, women, boys and girls.

Another important section is that of *Publications*. The works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother—Her talks—are being compiled, edited and translated into various languages and published. Journals and periodicals devoted to the exposition of the Teaching and Philosophy of the Master are being issued in English, Bengali, Hindi, Gujerathi, Kanarese, Telugu. The school children have their own hand-written journals in five languages. The latest addition to this series of Periodicals is the Quarterly Bulletin issued by the Jeunesse Sportive de l'Ashram de Sri Aurobindo (for that is the name of the Physical Education Section). This Bulletin, profusely illustrated and containing original contributions from the pen of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, has acquired a special importance of its own.

The sales of all these publications are handled by the *Book Sales Dept.* which attends to mail order business in addition to cash sales. Similar arrangements are made for the distribution of Photographs.

There is a steady stream of visitors to the Ashram all the year round and some arrangements have had to be made for their stay. The Ashram has two guest houses: one on the sea-face with a number of rooms and a big Hall specially constructed to accommodate large parties and the other near the Ashram, *Golconde*. We will say a few words about this building at the end of this section. The *Transport Service* consisting of jeeps, cars and carrier carts, helps in fetching the visitors from the station and in many other ways. The *Bureau Central* is in charge of arranging for the stay of visitors. The necessary permit cards for board and lodge are issued to them on arrival (with previous permission),

and their needs are provided for. The Bureau collects the dues from them while leaving: for visitors have to meet their own expenses when arrangements are done for them by the Ashram. There is a *Reception Service* which helps the new-comers to go round and acquaint themselves with the working of the Ashram. Visitors are permitted to participate in the Ashram life as far as feasible, without disturbing the regular routine.

A *Secretariat*, the *Cashier's Office* and a *Postal Service* form useful complements in the organisation.

A word about *Golconde*. This building which has been described by experts as the only one of its kind in Asia was designed and constructed under the guidance of the famous architect M. Antonin Raymond of U.S.A. Regarding the origin of this project the following excerpts from a letter of Sri Aurobindo will be found enlightening:

"In Golconde Mother has worked out her own idea through Raymond, Sammer and others. First Mother believes in beauty as a part of spirituality and divine living; secondly, she believes that physical things have the Divine Consciousness underlying them as much as living things and thirdly that they have an individuality of their own and ought to be properly treated, used in the right way, not misused or improperly handled or hurt or neglected so that they perish soon or lose their full beauty or value; she feels the consciousness in them and is so much in sympathy with them that what in other hands may be spoilt or wasted in a short time last with her for years or decades. It is on this basis that she planned Golconde. First, she wanted a high architectural beauty, and in this she succeeded—architects and people with architectural knowledge have admired it with enthusiasm as a remarkable achievement; one spoke

of it as the finest building of its kind he had seen with no equal in all Europe or America and a French architect, pupil of a great master, said it executed superbly the idea which his master had been seeking for but failed to realise; but also she wanted all the objects in it, the rooms, the fitting, the furniture to be individually artistic and to form a harmonious whole. This too was done with great care. Moreover, each thing was arranged to have its own use, for each thing there was a place, and there should be no mixing up, or confused or wrong use."

At present a part of the building is being utilised for permanent residents of the Ashram and the rest for receiving guests.

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As noted earlier, the Ashram maintains in its various services a fairly large number of paid workers—well over seven hundred. The rules and conditions of service perforce conform to the Labour legislation in force in French India. The wages paid compare favourably with those current elsewhere for similar work; free medical attention is given to them and their families. Presents of cloths and bonus are given periodically by the Mother. Facilities have been provided for them to run a school for their children and premises to hold meetings of their Union which has been started lately in good will. Payment is made on fortnightly basis from the Cashier's and allied pay offices. Loans and advances are also given when needed. There have been instances where a few chosen of these workmen have been allowed by the Mother to partake of some of the privileges confined

only to the inmates of the Ashram e.g. to mess in the Dining Room free of cost along with others. Hanging on the wall in the central office of the Building Service is a direction from the Mother to the executives:

"No workman must be given any work exceeding *his* strength; it is unfair and inhuman to do so...".

III

We have given a rough outline of the functioning of the the collective life in the Ashram. We have also indicated the basis on which the entire creative endeavour proceeds viz. the inner life of the seeker getting shaped and built in the mould of the Ideal pointed out by Sri Aurobindo. Hitherto facilities to participate in this pioneer effort have been limited to those who could cut off their moorings with the outside world and exclusively dedicate themselves to the Cause by joining the Ashram. It is now felt desirable and possible to extend the field to a larger number of persons without requiring them to join the Ashram. This new direction to the Ashram life will be on the lines of a University where the Education that will be imparted will be on the same lines on which life at the Ashram is being lived. It will have a fourfold character—the training and development of the physical, the vital, the mental and the psychic and spiritual sides—all these forming in their ensemble an integral perfection of the individual. The Ashram develops itself into a Centre where men and women attracted to this Ideal can gather, can educate themselves in ways best suited to the working out of the Truth of the Ideal in their own person, and go out as vanguards of a

way of life that has been fashioned by the Mother in accordance with the principles of Sri Aurobindo's Teachings to help man rise to his full manhood and win the crown from the brow of the gods.

M. P. PANDIT

SRI AUROBINDO UNIVERSITY CENTRE

THE PURPOSE

WHAT is the distinctive character of the proposed Sri Aurobindo University Centre meriting special claim on public support? The answer is to be found in the way of life as it is developed at the Ashram and in the school which forms an integral part of the main institution.

The collective life that has grown up in the Ashram with the basis of an inner life of the individual practicant is best studied on three levels—the spiritual, the mental and the physical. There is, to begin with, the dominating emphasis on the life of the soul, the help and guidance for entering into the depths of one's being and to live from within outwards. The very presence of the Mother charged with the Spirit of Sri Aurobindo has created an atmosphere conducive to a natural growth of godward aspiration. Mind is the nearest to the heights of the spirit and it is in the intellectual, cultural and aesthetic aspects of the Ashram that the results of the mode of life here are most spectacular. Under the lead given by the Master, a new type of literature, in prose and poetry, has grown up. Original research work of far reaching consequence has been carried on in the field of ancient Indian culture and spirituality, notably the Veda and the Upanishads. Successful experiments have been made towards the evolution of spiritual or mystic poetry the proto-types of which are to be found only in

the hymnal literature of the Vedic Age. This literary and cultural activity is pursued and has found expression in some of the major languages of the country, as also in classical ones like Sanskrit; the half-a-dozen and more of the journals connected with the Ashram have carried wide only a part of the work in the line. There are artists, old and young, who find newer founts of inspiration, there are musicians finding newer melodies flowing through their fingers and vocal chords. And then,—this is an important feature—great care and industry is bestowed on the reclamation and development of the physical body with a sole view of housing in it the splendour of the Spirit. A discipline is being maintained towards perfection whereby the body with all its members can be made as supple, as intelligent as needed to meet the demands of the Soul on this its basic instrument.

Behind and above all this intense life there reigns a spiritual Power, the Light of a Higher Consciousness brought down by the Master and left to be completed by the Mother in the new type that is in the making. It is that which invests everything here with significance. The present writer was intrigued in the beginning, when in the course of his work his finger would automatically lie on the particular card or paper or file that was wanted amidst hundreds. Recurrence of the phenomenon with increased frequency eliminated the possibility of Chance and the working of a faculty or consciousness which is self-acting had to be recognised. Again, though never noted for strong memory, he found in himself an unusual capacity to remember hundreds of names with attendant details, and it is interesting to note, they would clean fade away once the necessity was over. Similar is the experience of most

of the inmates, in varied ways, working in the different departments of the Ashram. These instances are given just to draw attention to the functioning of these higher faculties in an atmosphere congenial to their manifestation. Mind and Reason are not the last word.

This is the background of the institution proposed to be erected for providing facilities to a larger number of men and women to build themselves in all their fullness in the light of the Ideal inspired and implanted by Sri Aurobindo. There is already in Ashram a nucleus for it—a school where nearly a hundred pupils including children of tender age are receiving training. The school was started some years ago by the Mother under the auspices of Sri Aurobindo with his blessings and he considered it as the beginnings of the making of a new vehicle of expression for his Message. The Mother has preferred children of young age for the simple reason that habits are not formed in them and they offer plastic material for moulding into the desired shape. There is no attempt at teaching them truths of spiritual life or yoga or moral precepts; they imbibe them in the general atmosphere and learn to react instinctively to things of the Spirit in a direct and unsophisticated manner without the inhibitions of awe and fear intervening between them and their Maker. There is undoubtedly a syllabus and an examination system to support the studies at the school. The students are encouraged to devote themselves to particular subjects for which they have aptitude. Thus one may read history in the fourth class while studying mathematics in the second; deficiency in one subject is not allowed to arrest progress in others. Contrary to what Pundits of education say, it is found here that young children have a striking capacity to pick up languages—only they should

not have to learn them compulsorily. Any boy (or girl) in the Ashram, for instance, knows English, French, Hindustani, his mother-tongue Bengali or Gujerathi etc. in addition to something of the local language Tamil. Children interest themselves in arts like photography and painting; some choose to know crafts in the workshops and carpentry sections of the Ashram. Needless to add, these extra-curricular activities are encouraged and promoted. The guiding principle is, in the words of Sri Aurobindo:

"Every child is a lover of interesting narrative, a hero-worshipper and a patriot. Appeal to these qualities in him and through them let him master without knowing it the living and human parts of his nation's history. Every child is an enquirer, an investigator, analyser, a merciless anatomist. Appeal to those qualities in him and let him acquire without knowing it the right temper and the necessary fundamental knowledge of the scientist. Every child has an insatiable intellectual curiosity and turn for metaphysical enquiry. Use it to draw him on slowly to an understanding of the world and himself. Every child has the gift of imitation and a touch of imaginative power. Use it to give him the groundwork of the faculty of the artist."

The proposed University Centre is to rise and radiate round this nucleus. Select men and women of all races, nationalities and religions will be enabled to live here and develop themselves in any line they choose but with a spiritual background and motif. All branches of learning, Humanities, Sciences, theoretical and applied, will be taught. The practical side of the spiritual discipline followed here will also be rendered accessible to those who have a call for

it. It goes without saying that in an atmosphere as this where mind and its normal operations are at best regarded as just one of the means open to man to acquire knowledge of the world and the Sciences, other faculties will be encouraged to be brought into play for a growing enlargement of the frontiers of human knowledge.

Already we have here students from the five continents and offers have come from many countries to serve the University. The medium of instruction will be the mother-tongue of the student.

The University with full modern equipment will be a residential one, with arrangements for separate group life of students from different countries within the framework of the larger community. An International Museum is proposed to be built where students (and visitors) will find all important civilisations, past and present, of the world presented in line, design and lay-out in so many blocks. Artists from various countries will carry out the task of giving expression to their national life.

The sole authority for founding and fostering this institution naturally rests in the sacred hands of her who founded and developed the Ashram for Sri Aurobindo thirty years ago and who alone knows best how to translate effectively his Ideals into practice,—She, the Mother. The institution will be an autonomous body with no scope for outside interference. For its life is to continue unaffected by any likely change in the Government or political status of the place where it is situate.

The way of life here will be the way of Sri Aurobindo's conception. It will be neither American nor European, neither western nor eastern; it will include the best of both, the dynamism of the West and the poise of the East, and

much more because it will be in consonance with the Great Ideal of Perfect Man to which the Sage devoted over forty years of his magnificent life in unparalleled seclusion. He has taught that the Unity of the Human Race will proceed only from man's harmonious relation with man on the level of the soul and all life here has necessarily to centre round this key-conception.

It is to be noted that in this institution the commercial basis is altogether absent. 'I will not sell education',—these are the weighty words of the Mother the full value of which it is for the world to appreciate and realise. We have appealed to the public for cooperation and assistance. We approach all who have the goodwill and sympathy for the undertaking, as comrade extending to comrade the privilege of contributing towards the evolution of the community of a new Order.

M. P. Pandit
Gen. Secretary,
Sri Aurobindo University Centre Fund Committee

Ans. 8.